

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 5, 2009

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We respectfully request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) initiate a comprehensive review of all commercial pilot training and certification programs.

Last month, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) convened a three-day public hearing to learn more about the February 12, 2009 crash of Continental Connection Flight 3407 operated by regional carrier Colgan Air. The accident, which claimed the lives of 50 people, occurred five miles from Buffalo-Niagara International Airport.

The hearings yielded a number of findings with respect to the causes of the crash, including the pilot's failure to perform a proper stall recovery; the crew's lack of hands-on training and experience in the plane's safety systems; the failure of Colgan Air to perform a proper background check on pilots; questionable handling of failed check-rides by Colgan Air; the crew's non-essential cockpit conversation below 10,000 feet in violation of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) sterile cockpit regulations; and issues of overall crew fatigue.

These revelations prompted additional public scrutiny of all regional air carriers – which account for nearly half of the nation's commercial flights – and how the FAA regulates them.

As a result, we advocated for this study in the form of an amendment to H.R 915, the FAA Reauthorization Act. While the House passed both the amendment and legislation, the need for this comprehensive review is too pressing to wait for Senate action.

We therefore request that the GAO examine the following aspects of all commercial pilot training and certification programs, including regional and commuter air carriers:

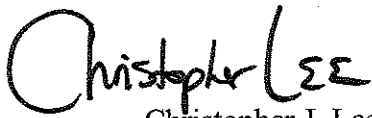
- How many training hours are required for pilots operating new aircraft types before assuming pilot in-command duties?
- How do air carriers update and train pilots on new technologies in aircraft types in which they hold certifications?

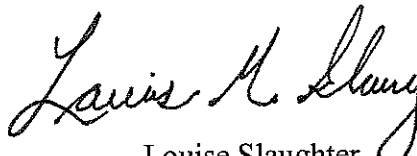
- What remedial actions are taken in cases of repeated unsatisfactory check-rides by commercial airline pilots?
- What stall warning systems are used in flight simulator training compared to classroom instruction?
- What information is required to be provided by pilots on their job applications and what ability do air carriers have to verify the information provided?
- Other aspects of FAA and international standards with respect to commercial pilot training and certification programs that may warrant the attention of Congress. It may be that additional questions arise once you begin your work, so we reserve the right to modify this request.


The results of this comprehensive review will inform future steps taken by Congress to improve pilot training practices and ensure passenger safety and confidence.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this request. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Jeff Freeland, legislative aide in Rep. Lee's office, at (202) 225-5265.

Sincerely,


Christopher J. Lee
Member of Congress


Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress


Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

CC: Chairman James L. Oberstar, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Ranking Member John L. Mica, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Chairman Jerry F. Costello, Subcommittee on Aviation
Ranking Member Thomas E. Petri, Subcommittee on Aviation